



The Alabama Association of School Boards (AASB) opposes the FCC proposal to institute a sub-cap and overall cap on the Universal Service Fund, specifically on the E-Rate program.

AASB is the state legislatively designated organization and representative agency for members of local public school boards in Alabama.

Every K-12 public school board in the state is a member of AASB, which advocates for local school boards on the state and federal level.

Congress set a goal to provide high-speed broadband access as a focus of four individual Universal Service Fund (USF) programs, each with its own funding. Congress deliberately did not create a single funding pool to force each program to compete under a single cap.

The FCC manages the programs and its proposed cap on the USF directly conflicts with the intent of Congress. The unanimous passage of House Amendment 483 to H.R. 3351 expressly prohibits the FCC from implementing the rules establishing a cap.

Making the future of E-Rate funding subject to a cap will compromise funding stability to provide those services at a pivotal time. Local school boards work on the front line to provide broadband connectivity to school systems. The state leveraged E-Rate funding to build internet capacity in schools and continues to rely on that funding as demand grows. Local school boards require a stronger network as students have greater access to digital devices.

The proposed cap could have a devastating impact on students, particularly those with no internet access at home. Schools use internet-based resources to provide or supplement the instructional program. The internet puts far more content at teachers' and students' disposal that could be afforded via textbooks.

Imposing a cap on E-Rate threatens the state's effort that recognizes digital literacy as fundamental to public education. A recently enacted law mandates the creation of a computer science and digital literacy state course of study and will require computer science courses for every grade-level. Broadband connectivity is essential especially in the rural areas. Providing sufficient broadband connectivity at public schools is critical to prepare students for the national and international work force.

The proposed rule would compromise the USF which supports worthy programs. However, it is the threat to the E-Rate program that will most directly impact the nation's future and economic competitiveness. The E-Rate program is proven to be effective in expanding internet access to schools. Local schools must have the assurance that the financial support of the E-Rate program will continue to be available. Public schools serve every community in the state and reach every demographic to impact all students. The public school infrastructure and the E-Rate program's demonstrated benefit should make E-Rate the highest of priorities for the FCC.

AASB opposes the proposed rule to the USF and E-Rate program.

